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Soc.4.01.2 The Rope Dancer

P-Lesberg, Sandy

Orig. under
Marchetti

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REVIEW OF "THE ROPE DANCER"

JOHN WINGATE: Critic-at-large Sandy Lesberg is here, and he's reviewing a book, I should point out to you, by a man who between 3:30 and 4:00 today was my first long interview guest — Victor Marquetti, who, for 14 years, three of them as a top-ranking officer, was with the Central Intelligence Agency. He believes in a spy system, he told me, but thinks we run it in a very, very bad way. He was my guest this afternoon. Enough said. Here is Sandy Lesberg.

SANDY LESBERG: His book, Victor Marchetti's book, is called "The Rope Dancer." It's the story of an intelligence officer who defects to the Russians, and then the ultimate discovery by him that his superior in the department is also a Russian spy. It's sort of a frightening Alice-in-Wonderland concept — the entire central core of our government's intelligence system all gone rotten. What makes it more exciting, John, is the fact — as everyone knows who was listening to you earlier — the office for real, like you say, a man from the inside, so to speak. It sort of puts an aura of possibility, if not authenticity, on his novel.

The most fascinating parts of the book are the relationships with the Russian espionage people — that love-hate — intensely personal encounters that personalize the aloneness of any spy who walks into the other guy's camp. And, of course, the almost suicidal path the protagonist plunges down. In the end, what he knew all along, would be his death.

"The Rope Dancer" is a very tricky spy story. It stands as sort of an effervescent American answer to the super-cool British kind of thing, like "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold" and that sort of thing. Here's a guy of intellectual commitment to his own downfall, and a very strange and emotional commitment to these new-found friends of his on the other side, who he knows